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# Drug Trafficking Related Violence and Corruption Among Specific Populations in Mexico

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School of Justice Studies

Eastern Kentucky University

Drug Trafficking Related Violence and Corruption Among Specific Populations in  
Mexico

Honors Thesis  
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Drug Trafficking Related Violence and Corruption Among Specific Populations in  
Mexico

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**Abstract:** The trade of illegal narcotics through Mexico has resulted in the rise of powerful and organized criminal businesses that are not afraid to bribe, or kill, any who cross them. This has caused a dramatic increase in violent crime and government official corruption. This document will begin by defining these organizations and examining their creation. Next the violence caused by these organizations will be analytically categorized in order to better understand the criminal's motivations and tactics. This study will examine current data to determine which populations are more prone to violent crime or corruption by looking at the victims relationship to the drug trafficking market. The three possible categories are cartel members, government workers or citizens, and all three will be subcategorized. Lastly, this document will examine how the type or nature of the violence utilized by drug traffickers changes in order to accomplish specific goals.

*Keywords and phrases:* Mexico, drug trafficking, violence, drug war, corruption, narcotics, kingpin, torture, organized crime, execution

## **Introduction**

In 2006, Mexico declared war against the drug trafficking organizations operating within its borders. While narcotic trafficking has always attracted crime and crime groups, few expected the magnitude of the response from the Mexican transnational criminal organizations. The violence in Mexico has grown to unparalleled levels, occurring in more locations, with more frequency, and reaching previously unimagined levels of cruelty. Incidents of beheadings, mutilations, and piles of bodies left for public display are all too common. Additionally, corruption in the Mexican Criminal Justice System caused by these drug trafficking organizations has grown dramatically. This is exemplified by the firing of 3,200 federal police officers, almost 10% of the force, in August of 2010 for failing basic integrity tests (Beittel, 2012)

The rampant escalation of corruption and violence in Mexico is beginning to affect the state of democracy (Beittel, 2012). Citizens are starting to question whether the government has the ability to protect them (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011) and if left unchecked, these criminal acts could cause more severe problems. The extensive use of violence and corruption by Mexican criminal organizations must be better understood in order to promote a peaceful and law-abiding society. To that end, this paper attempts to bring new light to the problem by focusing on the victims of violence and corruption in order to determine if specific populations are more vulnerable to certain criminal acts than others. An individual's role and its impact on drug trafficking directly affects the use of violence and corruption by Mexican crime organizations, the type, nature, degree and purpose behind the act, and the goal sought after.

Prior this analysis, several points must be considered: the accuracy of current information, the definition and evolution of these criminal organizations, and why these organizations use violence and corruption. General trends of the violence and corruption in Mexico will also be considered. An analysis of the potential victims of violence and corruption based on an individual's three possible roles will be examined and then a look at the potential application of this information.

### **Considerations**

Before an analysis of how a person's occupation impacts their type, nature, and degree of violent victimization, several items must be addressed.

### ***Accuracy***

The accuracy of current information is problematic for several reasons. Broadly speaking, crime, especially corruption, is secretive by nature; determining the quantity, goal, or purpose of a crime, or whether a crime occurred at all, can be difficult. Ascertaining if an act was motivated by drug trafficking can be difficult as well. While it is easier to determine if a violent crime occurred due to the evidence left behind, new evidence is being discovered constantly and current statistics may not accurately reflect this.

There is reason to distrust the accuracy of information regarding the situation in Mexico specifically. All levels of the Mexican government have been found to have corrupt elements (Beittel, 2012) and are notorious for poorly documenting and

investigating crimes; this impacts the accuracy and reliability of their information. Some municipalities have little, if any, documentation and some even lack the presence of the Mexican government (Schatz, 2011). Additionally, journalists in Mexico are often a target of violence by drug trafficking organizations in order to prevent anti-drug trafficking media coverage.

To counter this, scholars have turned to three sources for information: the Mexican media, independent institutions, and private researchers. Since journalists and news stations are constantly targeted for violence, some media outlets are more reliable for drug-affiliated news. Due to their clear documentation and systematic labeling process, information provided by the national newspaper *La Reforma* are considered reliable, although limited; their journalists do not have access to all the resources the government has. The Trans-Border Institute, which operates out of San Diego, documents trends, frequency and locations of drug trafficking-related activity in their annual reports (Molzahn, Ríos & Shirk, 2012). A librarian in New Mexico, Molly Malloy, is also being credited with an accurate drug trafficking organization-related violence tally (O'Reilly, 2012). While these three examples may differ in their exact number and definition of DTO-related crimes, when used in conjunction with each other they show trends useful in analyzing the situation in Mexico.

### ***Definition***

These criminal groups must first be defined. There are many different labels for these Mexican criminal organizations, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. The

common term "cartel" is a misnomer, as it actually refers to businesses or corporations that fix prices. "Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO)" or "Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization (MDTO)" accurately describes a dominating aspect of these organizations, but doesn't take into account the newly-found criminal diversity of these groups. The term "Transnational Criminal Organization" is used by the United States government, and while it does capture the criminal diversity element, only two of the criminal organizations are actually transnational in their operations (Seelke and Finklea, 2011). "Organized Crime Group (OCG)" encompasses all aspects of these organizations, but is considered by most to be too broad (Molzahn, Ríos & Shirk, 2012). The terms "Organized Crime Group" and "Poly-Criminal Organizations" also fail to capture the excessively violent nature of these groups (Seelke and Finklea, 2011). Despite their varying strengths and weaknesses, this paper will often use many of the previous terms interchangeably.

While many terms may be used interchangeably, there are two that do not accurately describe these organizations. Some have tried to label these groups "terrorist cells" or "insurgents" due to their violent tactics and disregard for human life (Beittel, 2012) and in 2011, a Republican Texas Senator moved to have six of these organizations labeled as "Foreign Terrorist Organizations" on these grounds (Alexander, 2012). However, these organizations seek only to engage in criminal activity, not capture or replace the existing government (Kan, 2011), which are crucial components in defining a group as terrorist or rebellious. Thus the problem is considered one of criminality, not terrorism (Beittel, 2012).

Finding a term that encompasses all aspects of these criminal organizations can be difficult, but their goals are quite clear. These criminal organizations exist solely to make money (Kan, 2011). Their wealth-focused agenda is comparable to that of a business, and the United States has begun to conceptualize these groups as profit driven corporations (Beittel, 2012). They're also characterized as a special interests group, albeit an illegal one (Thoumi, 2003). These organizations specialize in the production, transportation and distribution of illegal narcotics. This is not their only source of income, but has traditionally been their main source. Drug trafficking was the activity that gave birth to the violent struggle we find in Mexico today.

## **Background**

### ***History of Drug Trafficking and the Evolution of Mexican Cartels***

Mexican organized crime specializes in trafficking many different drugs that are illegal in the United States, but the three most popular are cocaine, marijuana and heroin. All three grow in the climates of South America. Cocaine, currently the most financially-significant drug for Mexican traffickers, is produced from the coca plant which grows well in the mountains of Peru, Bolivia and Columbia (Thoumi, 2003).

Modern Mexican organized crime groups got their start from South American traffickers. The infamous Medellin and Cali drug trafficking organizations operated out of Columbia, and came to dominate the South American illegal trafficking industry in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They shipped huge amounts of narcotics through Florida



by boat in the 1980's; approximately 80% of cocaine consumed in the United States during this time was shipped through the port in Dade County, Florida (Gootenberg, 2010).

Eventually the United States recognized the need for greater constraints on this trade. They began patrolling the Caribbean routes more extensively while, with the help of the Columbian government, attempting to dismantle the Columbian cartels (Beittel, 2012). This had at least three direct effects on the drug trade: first, Columbian cartels switched their primary cash crop from marijuana to cocaine, as it was both more valuable and easier to smuggle (Rengert, 1996). Secondly, Columbian OCG's had less manpower to transport the drugs and, lastly, cartels had less money to pay for transport. What they did have was a highly marketable product and they struck a deal with Mexican criminal elements; the Columbians would pay them \$1,000- \$2,000 per kilogram of coke smuggled into the United States (Simser, 2011). However, as Columbian traffickers began to feel more governmental pressure, Mexican criminals were able to get better deals: they received higher trafficking wages, then were eventually paid in cocaine (Gootenberg, 2010). The amount of Columbian cocaine ferried via Mexican criminal organizations into the United States grew from 30% in the mid-late 1980's to at least 50% in the early 1990's (Molzahn, Ríos & Shirk, 2012). Some experts hypothesize that travelling through Mexico was the preferred and primary method of trafficking Columbian cocaine as early as 1992 (Gootenberg, 2010).

A national Mexican cartel, often called *La Federacion* or the Guadalajara cartel (Astorga & Shirk, 2010), was formed to ship the cocaine. The formation of Mexican criminals into an organized illegal corporation was caused by several factors. First, the

original members and leaders of the Federation were related to each other by family ties or marriage. This promoted internal cohesion and cooperation, which is often something found wanting in organized crime groups (Simser, 2011). Secondly, Colombian cartels paid the Guadalajara cartel in product; this required them to sell cocaine, instead of just traffic it, in order to realize a profit (Simser, 2011) and the greater demand for illegal drugs in the United States encouraged *La Federacion* to sell it across the border (Seelke and Finklea, 2011). Third, the ruling Mexican political party, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) was notoriously corrupt. They had complied with traffickers since the Mexican Revolution (Gootenberg, 2010). Their corruption is epitomized in the state sponsored protection racket that formed (Snyder & Duran-Martinez, 2009), which regulated and protected drug traffickers (Berrong, 2009) while minimizing competition (Gootenberg, 2010). The Federation and the PRI reached a bargain; traffickers would show deference to public officials, refrain from kidnapping, help discredit PRI rivals (Morris, 2012), and avoid violence against top officials (Simser, 2011). In return, they were allowed to traffic drugs, corrupt PRI-supporting officials, and generally manage their own affairs (Simser, 2011). Finally, weak law enforcement measures encouraged both local corruption and collusion with drug trafficking organizations (Simser, 2011).

However, *La Federacion* was not to last. The Guadalajara cartel's breakup was caused by two reasons. First, personal conflicts among the original traffickers in the DTO lead to defections, betrayals and eventually violence. Without the previous level of trust between members, competing elements within the organization began to form separate rival organizations (Astorga & Shirk, 2010). Secondly, the 71-year-old authoritarian rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party ended in 2000 with the presidential election of

Vicente Fox (Berrong, 2009). With the PRI no longer in power, the state sponsored protection racket was broken, and the new drug trafficking organizations no longer had security or trust in their arrangements with government officials (Snyder & Duran-Martinez, 2009). Competition between trafficking organizations began to increase, which caused a corresponding escalation in violence.

The point was reached that the government needed to intercede, and in 2006 President Felipe Calderon declared a war on the cartels. The Mexican strategy, partially funded by the United States through the Merida Initiative, gave the military the authority to directly oppose drug traffickers and organized crime (Seelke and Finklea, 2011). The Mexican military now actively participates in the maintenance of law and order, and is responsible for peace and social stability (Moloeznik, 2003). However, military intervention was designed to be a temporary measure until police forces, through additional equipment and training, could once again deal with drug trafficking organizations (Beittel, 2012).

In order to reduce the scope of the drug trafficking problem, several strategies were implemented. The Mexican government adopted a nonselective policy that focused on dismantling the criminal organizations in order to reduce the problem from a national security threat to a law and order problem (Beittel, 2012). However, many have questioned the wisdom of a non-differential dismantling strategy in eliminating organized crime and impeding the flow of illegal narcotics (Rengert, 1996; Beittel, 2012; Molzahn, Ríos & Shirk, 2012). Additionally the Mexican government began to focus on removing cartel leaders. Called the "Kingpin" theory, removing leaders would create greater tensions and instability in criminal organizations, which would fragment into smaller and

more easily manageable groups (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). The effectiveness of this strategy is in question as well; the Kingpin strategy has been shown to increase violence in areas where it is applied (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011) while having a negligible effect on disrupting drug trafficking (Beittel, 2012).

### ***Current Drug Trafficking Statistics***

The trafficking of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana has attracted entrepreneurs for decades, due in no small part to the enormous profits that can be made (Rengert, 1996). The DEA estimated that in 2010, drug traffickers worldwide made at least \$350 billion in profits (Vulliamy, 2010). Sources also estimate that in 2010 the worldwide markets for heroin and cocaine were, respectively, \$65 and \$88 billion (Simser, 2011). In areas where drug income is the primary route to gaining wealth, which describes many urban and rural areas of Mexico, the acceptance and popularity of drug trafficking increases (Rengert, 1996).

Many traffickers attempt to ship drugs to the United States because of the high demand. Thirteen million United States citizens a month spend approximately \$200

billion annually on illegal drugs (Warner, 2012).

Trafficking cocaine is of special interest to Mexican smugglers, as it makes up

<b>Illegal Drug Trafficked</b>	<b>Estimated Percent of Cartel Profits</b>
Cocaine	60.0 - 62.0
Marijuana	20.0 - 25.0
Heroin	8.0 - 11.0
Amphetamine	1.0 - 2.0

(Figure 1)

approximately 60% of a DTO's income (see figure 1 for more detail). Ninety percent of cocaine consumed in the United States, valued at an estimated \$37 billion, travels through Mexico (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). The potential for extreme revenue appeals to many people from Mexico. Serving as a lookout, reportedly the lowest paying job on the DTO pay scale, can earn you at least \$800 a month, which puts many in the top 10% of their community. Gunmen and traffickers make even more (Stout, 2012).

How much money flows to Mexican criminal organizations is a question often debated. ICE estimates that MDTO's make between \$19 and \$29 billion dollars in profit; the DEA estimates between \$8.3 and \$24.9 billion (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). To put this in perspective, Google's worldwide revenue in 2009 was only \$23.6 billion (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010).

### ***Why Cartels Use Violence and Corruption***

Using a business model, we can see why drug trafficking criminal organizations may choose to use violence. In order for any company to make money, the product must get to the client. In an illegal, and increasingly competitive, market, this can be difficult as there are many potential problems. The illegality of the product makes it vulnerable to theft by other criminals and seizure by the state, renders written records and property rights useless, and requires greater secrecy and mobility in the salesman. The possibility of punishment by the state, including jail or prison time, physical injury, or death, increases the magnitude of the risk taken and the need for both parties to make a successful transaction (Kan, 2011). Additionally, the more profitable the potential dealings are, the

greater the need for stability and a successful transaction (Rengert, 1996). Illegal markets, by their nature, lack the stability and predictability found in legal markets; violence may be used, by either the buyer or seller, to create this stability, while corruption may be used to minimize or neutralize the threat from the state (Kan, 2011).

There exists another condition that may cause drug trafficking organizations to opt for violent action. There is nothing that can impose order. Those that traffic narcotics don't recognize the legal authority of the Mexican government and thus refuse to obey its laws. The Mexican government is purging itself of corrupt elements, removing the potential of forming another state sponsored protection racket. No single criminal organization is strong enough to impose order on all other cartels, and the hypercompetitive market and potential for great profit prevents a coalition of cartels from banding together to impose order (Kan, 2011).

The lack of an arbitrator able to enforce order creates a new option for expanding an organization's profit. Instead of improving the quality of their product, reducing prices or brokering deals, these organizations can obtain a greater profit by simply removing their competitors (Kan, 2011). This tactic would be extremely difficult to perform in a competitive illegal market with an order-imposing arbitrator and nigh impossible in a legal one.

The need for stability in illegal markets and the violent removal of problems is exemplified in the "Plata o Plomo" attitude adopted by Mexican cartels (Simser, 2011). Directly translated as "silver or lead", it's also called the "bribe or bullet" mentality (Thoumi, 2003). When the cartels approach a citizen with a job, that person is given a choice: work with the drug traffickers, or risk the bodily harm or death of himself and

potentially his family. There is no middle ground and often no chance to negotiate. The Mexican TCO's use force and threats of force to create predictability, and remove and replace those individuals that refuse to "play ball."

### ***MDTO Violent Crime Statistics and Trends***

The quantity of drug trafficking-related violent crime in Mexico has steadily increased since President Calderon's declaration of war in 2006. The current figures are often debated due to the varying ranges; most media sources have settled on about 50,000-70,000 deaths from December 2006 through June 2012, although one researcher, Molly Malloy, estimates that the total could be close to 100,000 (O'Reilly, 2012). As a note of comparison, the "Troubles" committed by the IRA in Northern Ireland killed only 3,500 people and the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Turkey killed a little over 12,000 (Kan, 2011).

Another disturbing trend is the increase in the number of fatalities in each violent drug trafficking-related encounter. It's been noted that before 2010, no violent skirmish between drug traffickers and rivals, the government, or the public resulted in the death of more than twenty five victims at one time (Moore, 2012). However in August of 2010, *Los Zetas* bound, blindfolded and executed 72 illegal immigrants (Moore, 2012). Some sources hypothesize that their death was the result of their refusal to help the Zetas traffic drugs across the border (Seelke and Finklea, 2011).

The rate of drug trafficking-related homicides has also increased since President Calderon declared war on the cartels. Approximately 2,200 people died due to drug trafficking violence in 2007, and the number of drug related killings only increased in the following years (Seelke and Finklea, 2011; see figure 2 for more details). The 2010

Mexican National Police estimated

the homicide rate for Mexico in

2010 was 18.1 people out of every

100,000 (Me, Bisogno & Malby,

2011). The World Health

Organization states that a homicide

rate exceeding 10 per 100,000 people

is considered one of epidemic proportions (Doggett, 2011).

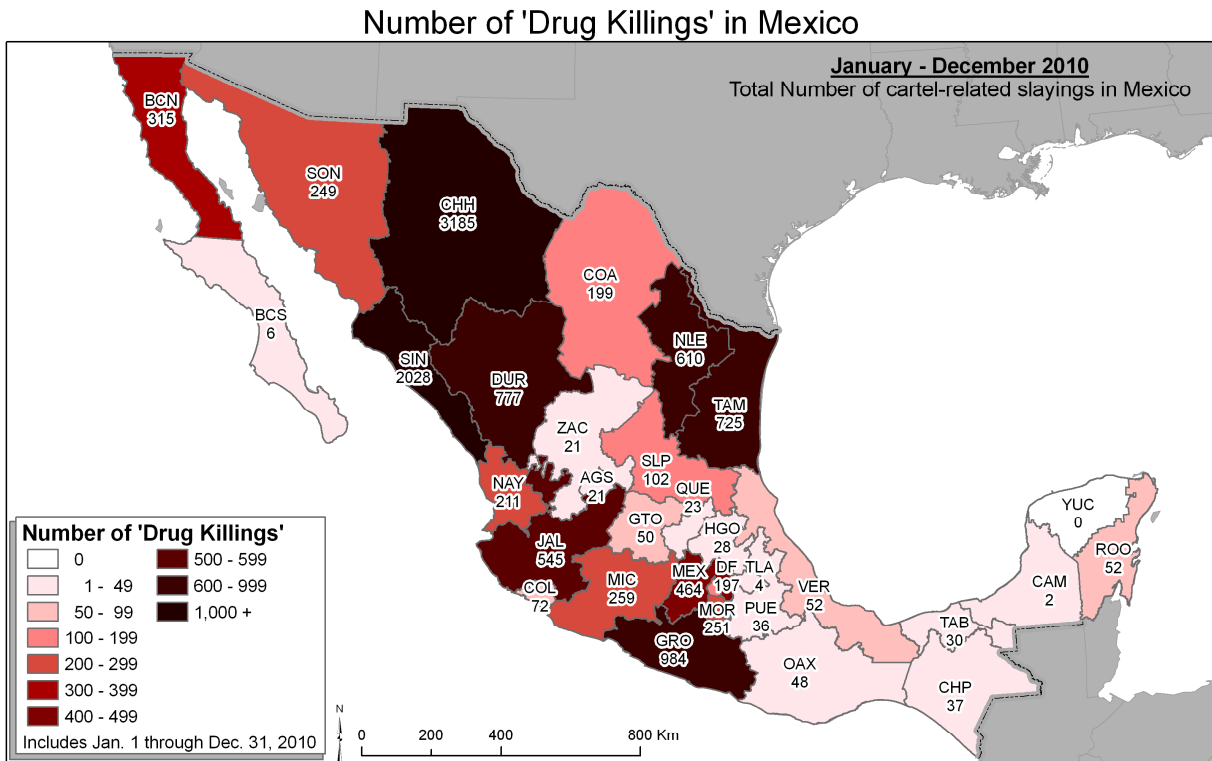
Year	DTO-Related Fatalities
2007	2,200
2008	5,100
2009	6,500
2010	11,500

(Figure 2)

### ***Location of DTO Violence***

The location of drug trafficking-related violence in Mexico has changed. Traditionally this violent crime has been highly concentrated in either Mexican states bordering the U.S., such as Chihuahua, Baja California, and Tamaulipas, or coastal states like Sinaloa (see figure 3). Government data states that in 2010, northern border states accounted for roughly 50% of all homicides. Additionally the violence has been highly concentrated. 80% of drug trafficking-related violence occurs in 7% of Mexican municipalities. The top 1% of municipalities with the highest rates of violence is located in only 5 states, with Chihuahua having two high violence zones (Beittel, 2012).





Source: State and national totals of cartel-related slayings in Mexico ("ejecuciones" and "narcocajecuciones") obtained from data provided by *Reforma* newspaper.

Maximum and Minimum values:

Maximum value: 3,185 in Chihuahua

Minimum value: No 'ejecuciones' were recorded in the state of Yucatán according to the source for these maps, *Reforma* newspaper.

National average: The national total number of 'ejecuciones' (cartel-related slayings) Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2010 was 11,583

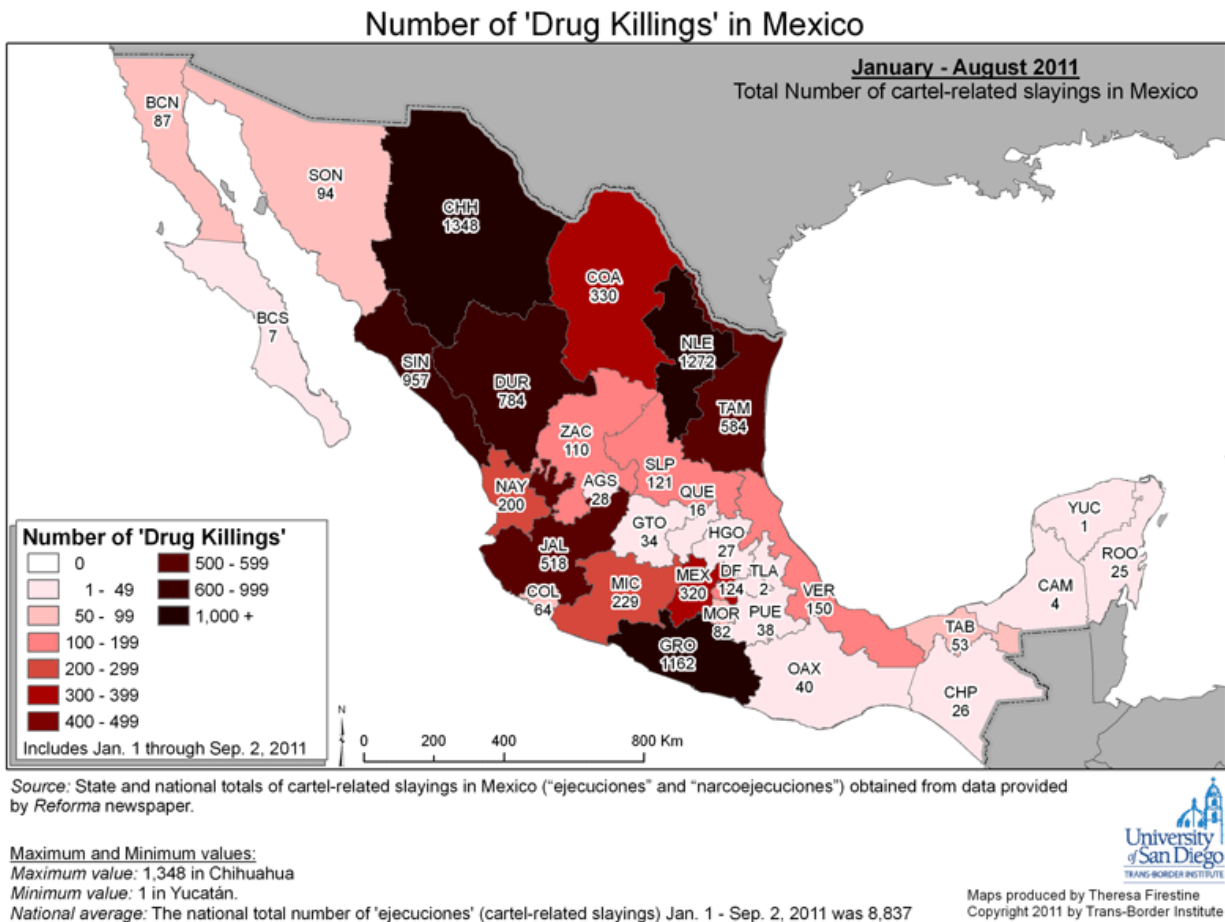


Maps produced by Theresa Firestone  
Copyright 2010 by Trans-Border Institute

(Figure 3, Courtesy of the Trans-Border Institute and the Justice in Mexico Project)

However, the violence is starting to move inland (see figure 4). The same border states previously mentioned accounted for only 44% of all Mexican homicides in 2011. Previously unaffected areas, such as Monterrey and Guadalajara, are also increasing in drug-related violent crime (Beittel, 2012). Some researchers are starting to believe that the change in drug-related violence location is partially caused by the fragmentation of drug trafficking organizations (Beittel, 2012; Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). Violence has been, for the most part, limited to Mexico, although experts are concerned at the

possibility of drug-related crime "spilling" into the United States (Finklea, Krouse & Rosenblum, 2011).



(Figure 4, Courtesy of the Trans-Border Institute the Justice in Mexico Project)

## Categories

Even though the location may differ, there are patterns concerning who is targeted for violence and what kinds of violence are used against them. Victims of drug related violence can be broken down into three categories based on their role in drug trafficking:

cartel members, government employees, and citizens. The selection of each target has specific purposes and characteristics that encourage certain crimes and violent acts over others.

### ***Cartel-Cartel Violence***

Violence may be committed against members of a drug trafficking organization. Known as cartel on cartel violence, this is the kind of violence most associated with drug trafficking. The Mexican government estimates that approximately 90% of drug-related violence in Mexico target those somehow involved in the drug trade (Beittel, 2012). However, this statistic has been met with skepticism as sources outside the Mexican government have been unable to validate this claim due to a lack of crucial information. This category has two distinct subcategories: inter-cartel violence and intra-cartel violence.

Inter-cartel violence is violence against a separate cartel. As previously mentioned, violence is a method of resolving disputes that can arise for a variety of reasons; price, purity, delivery times and location, personnel, territory, payment, seizure, theft and secrecy (Kan, 2011). Violence is used as the ultimate settler of disputes. DTO's target rivals in an attempt to intimidate or remove them in order to increase their own share of the drug market.

Since the purpose is the intimidation and removal of rivals, drug trafficking organizations are more prone to certain violent acts over others. Torture, murder and assassination are the preferred crimes for accomplishing this goal. Contract killing and

murder permanently remove rivals. Torture is useful in that it physically removes rival operators temporarily and discourages other rivals from operating. It's important to note which crimes are generally not used in this category: arson, kidnapping, extortion and assault.

As the intimidation of rivals is a key component to inter-cartel violence, the nature of this violence must be both gruesome and excessive. Recent inter-cartel activity supports this. Notes left next to slain victims and large banners at mass graves explain why the victim or victims are dead. These so-called narco-messages are tools of intimidation against rival cartels, the government and the public by increasing the violent reputation of a specific organization (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). The presentation of killings is additional evidence of the gruesome and excessive nature of inter-cartel violence. In the western state of Durango in 2011, a mass grave was found by the Mexican government. The grave held an estimated 200 gunmen from various organizations killed by the Sinaloa cartel (Moore, 2012). Cartels have also begun piling slain rivals in public places for display. 35 mutilated bodies were found on a downtown street in the state of Veracruz with a note stating that "all Zetas would die" (Moore, 2012). The method and nature of individual killings is no exception to the shocking violence in Mexico. The Trans-Border Institute in San Diego estimated that in 2011, almost 10% of executed victims (1,173) were tortured before their death, and almost 5% were decapitated (Molzahn, Ríos & Shirk, 2012).

The other subcategory of cartel-cartel violence is intra-cartel violence. This kind of violence can be defined as violence within an illegal organization. It serves two purposes. First, it is often used as a method of code enforcement (Friman, 2009). In an

illegal organization without the backing of the state, some form of cohesiveness must be achieved. Violence, and the threat thereof, can be seen as the “glue” that helps hold everyone together; the threat of physical punishment holds everyone accountable and encourages members to complete their assignments (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). It’s important to note that intra-cartel violence in the form of code enforcement is rarely documented as often there is little proof it occurred: the physical evidence, such as bruises or broken bones, can disappear, and the victim of the crime is unlikely to report its occurrence to the government as this would implicate themselves in a transnational crime organization. The second purpose of violence within a drug trafficking organization is to fill internal vacancy chains (Beittel, 2012). The removal of a drug trafficker, whether by government apprehension or cartel violence, results in the opportunity for another trafficker to take his place. Should there be more than one potential employee looking for a promotion, the two prospects can fight and the victor would claim the open position. Filling internal vacancy chains is the more visible form of the two purposes as occasionally the loser will be killed. However, it’s important to note that not all leadership vacancies are filled through violence.

As the purposes of intra-cartel violence are to maintain internal cohesion and fill internal leadership vacancies (Beittel, 2012), patterns can be seen in its application. This violence is more commonly expressed in assaults more than any other crime. Physical assaults allow the maintenance of order in an illegal organization by punishing the offender without killing the transgressor, who still has the potential to operate and make a profit for the organization. Physical assaults also allow the prime candidate for a position to be clearly identified without killing the loser. It’s important to note, however, that

sometimes the death of the loser is seen as necessary; murder is somewhat common in order for the victor to truly secure his position. Logic would state that the death of the loser would be more common for higher-ranking positions, but there has been no study of this at the time of this paper. Kidnapping is also useful as a method of code enforcement and coercion; drug traffickers or retailers are more likely to remain loyal to the cartel if their family members are hostages (Associated Press, 2013). Similarly to inter-cartel violence, the crimes of arson and extortion are not common methods of code enforcement or filling internal gaps of leadership.

When compared to inter-cartel violence, the nature of intra-cartel violence seems relatively tame. There is significantly less loss of life when enforcing rules and filling internal gaps in the chain of command. There's also significantly less cruelty or carnage as intra-cartel violence usually lacks the magnitude of intimidation necessary in inter-cartel violence.

### ***Cartel-Government Violence***

A Mexican drug trafficking organization may also commit violence against the government. This violence is not limited to only members of the Mexican government; it may be directed at those who work for any government, including agents and criminal justice educators from the United States. The Mexican government estimates that violence against Mexican forces consists of approximately 7% of all DTO-related violence (Beittel, 2012). Outside sources confirm that this kind of violence is definitely below 10% of all DTO-related violence (Kan, 2011). It's important to note that it can be

difficult to ascertain whether a killed government employee had ties to a cartel, as this would affect the number of cartel-government deaths. Many of the government forces slain by drug trafficking organizations are thought to have, at one point, conspired with them (Beittel, 2012). This violence may be directed at security forces, such as the police or the military, or those who influence and lead security forces, such as police chiefs, politicians and judges.

Violence against either group has the same three broad purposes. First, and most obvious, is the removal of those who attempt to enforce the law. Broadly speaking, cartels target anyone who prevents their organization from realizing its profit. This includes those that prove themselves effective at tackling organized crime, whether those individuals are street officers or senior administrators (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). Sometimes the families of those effective individuals are targeted. Hours after Melquisedet Córdoba of the Mexican Navy participated in the raid that killed the kingpin “El Barbas,” unrecognized gunmen killed his mother, two sisters, brother and aunt in their sleep (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). Secondly, Mexican transnational crime organizations may target government workers in order to remove officials that help rivals. The officials are often corrupt and in the employ of a rival (Morris 2012) , but that’s not always necessary. Middle Tennessee State University professor Stephen Morris encompasses both of these purposes in his article *Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Violence in Mexico*: “Anything a public servant does that can be interpreted as helping a rival cartel or hurting their own makes them a target.” This mindset easily lends itself to targeting rival corrupt officials for violence. Lastly, government employees are targeted

in order to persuade the Mexican government to shift its formal or informal enforcement strategies (Morris, 2012).

While all three purposes influence cartel-government violence, the idea that drug trafficker violence is used as a method of deterring law enforcement plays a crucial role in the type of violence used against government employees. MDTO's want, above all else, impunity to traffic drugs (Beittel, 2012). In the long run, this desire is better served by cowing local police and federal agents into inaction rather than removing them. Slain officers can be replaced; an intimidated officer consumes government resources that may otherwise be used more effectively (Morris, 2012). Also intimidated officers can potentially be corrupted, through bribes or threats, to provide intelligence and greater revenue for drug traffickers (Morris, 2012; Moore, 2012). The result is that most violence committed against this population is designed to intimidate the majority of the government rather than remove them (Kan, 2011). To clarify, this is *not* to say that drug trafficking organizations *only* try to intimidate or never try to kill, but that they know their interests are better served through the mass intimidation of government workers.

This knowledge is reflected in both the type and nature of violent acts committed against government security forces. The security forces in Mexico consist of those that actively and frequently enforce anti-narcotics laws. That can consist of, but is not limited to, preventative, investigative, local and federal police officers, correctional officers, and low level officers of the Mexican Army, Navy, and Special Forces. Some TCO's are more dangerous for security personnel than others; *Los Zetas* routinely "green light" the killing of military and police during drug trafficking-related violent operations (Hesterman, 2012).



Mexican police and military are at risk of specific violent crimes. Violent acts committed towards people in this category include murder, destruction of property, kidnapping and assault. While arson has been used, an analysis of arson cases in the first semester of 2011 revealed that it's not a common method to fight the police or military (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). Barry McCaffrey, the former director of the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, testified in 2009 that units of the Mexican police and army were also tortured (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). However, typical violence against security forces takes the form of ambushes and overwhelming firepower, as was the case 10 miles north of Aguascalientes in December of 2009. Two officers were slain and three were wounded when approximately 40 gunmen opened fire with automatic weapons and grenades on a police station during a security meeting with the mayor. There was also extensive damage to the building (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010).

In some ways, the nature of violence against security forces is similar to that of inter-cartel violence. Both groups are at risk of ambushes, torture, decapitation and postmortem mutilation and display (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). However, it's important to note that cartel victims are more at risk of postmortem mutilation and the public display of bodies than the Mexican police or military.

Violence against government employees is not limited to those on the front line of the drug war. Those who lead and administrate front line officers are at risk of violence from drug trafficking organizations. Public officials, judges, prison officials, treasury and banking officials, governors, mayors, and agency directors have all been targeted (Morris, 2012). Police department chiefs are targeted significantly more than others; out of the 174 political candidates and senior officials killed by Mexican organized crime

between December 2006 and September 2011, 48% were police chiefs. Mayors were the second most targeted occupation at 18% (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). Even a gubernatorial candidate, Rodolfo Torre Cantú, was killed in Tamaulipas in 2010 (Morris, 2012).

Of special interest to the cartels are those that have received training from the United States. In the state of Chihuahua lies La Ciudad Juarez, known as the most violent city in the world (Vulliamy, 2010). In 2007 many Mexican officials were trained in the United States to improve skills useful in combating the notoriously high murder rate in Juarez. By the middle of 2010, 98 Chihuahua officials, including police investigators, forensic experts and prosecutors, had been assassinated (Schatz, 2011).

Mexican criminal justice administrators are more prone to certain kinds of violent drug trafficking-affiliated crime than others. Murder in the form of assassinations and executions are common, and the threat of kidnapping and assault has grown so severe that 75 federal judges requested permission to carry weapons at all times for their "personal defense" (Schatz, 2011). Murder, assault and kidnapping are the crimes most likely to be committed against criminal justice supervisors.

It is important to examine the nature of drug trafficking-related violence against criminal justice leaders. Violence against government administrators lacks many characteristics found in cartel-cartel violence. For instance, there are no mass murders, although this likely due to the relatively low numbers of government administrators. There are no cases of arson (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011), postmortem mutilation or public display of bodies. For the most part, the nature of the violence is limited to ambushes, assassinations and executions (Schatz, 2011).

The targeting of high ranking officials and administrators has had a demoralizing effect on both security forces and the public. Some scholars go so far as to say that it has affected the state of democracy in Mexico (Beittel, 2012). A study in 2011 found that 56% of Mexican citizens believe the country is less safe since the government declared war on drug traffickers. Additionally, 42% of citizens in that survey think the drug traffickers are winning the war (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). Mexican citizens' mistrust in their government has caused many to look for alternate methods of protecting themselves, such as protesting, private security and private police agencies (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010), and even "vigilante justice via mob lynching's" (Schatz, 2011). Scholars note that the greater the perception of government ineffectiveness, the greater the chance that law abiding citizens will either resort to violence against drug distributors or adopt a "bunker mentality" (Rengert, 1996).

### *Cartel-Citizen Violence*

Lastly there is violence against citizens associated with neither criminal organizations nor the government. These targets are often journalists or businessmen although recently random, unaffiliated citizens have been targeted. Citizens are the least common group targeted for violence, approximately 2-7%, but this group has the greatest public shock and outrage when violence is perpetrated against them (Beittel, 2012). While the term 'citizen' encompasses every remaining occupation, this paper will focus on three groups at risk of specific DTO-related crime: journalists, businessmen, and random citizens.

Violence is directed at citizens for distinctive and specific purposes. Similarly to cartel-government violence, violence targeting citizens is often meant as a form of coercion. Some scholars have speculated that the 72 immigrants murdered by *Los Zetas* in August, 2010 were targeted because they refused to traffic narcotics for the criminal organizations (Moore, 2012). Drug traffickers may also target citizens for violence in order to realize a more direct profit. This is occasionally done by kidnapping immigrants and conscripting them as smugglers and gunmen in drug trafficking organizations (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). However, violence towards citizens in order to directly realize profits is commonly perpetrated through extortion and protection rackets (Snyder & Duran-Martinez, 2009).

Scholars have ascertained that certain civilian populations are more at risk of specific violent crimes. Journalists are at particular risk of assault and murder. They are targeted in an attempt to intimidate them into self-censoring stories that negatively portray drug trafficking organizations or any associated violence (Burnett, 2011). Additionally, businessmen are at risk of DTO-related violence in the form of extortion, assault and arson. Affluent entrepreneurs are often coerced into illegal protection rackets, and are in danger of having their business burned down if they don't pay (Guerrero-Gutierrez, 2011). The use of extortion by drug trafficking organizations is rampant: according to a 2010 estimate, *La Familia Michoacán* controlled approximately 85% of legitimate businesses in the state of Michoacán (Beittel, 2012). Some business owners are at risk of physical assault, murder and kidnapping as well (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). While random citizens are targeted for extortion rackets, they are at a greater risk of murder than other crimes (Moore, 2012).

Certain civilian populations are more at risk of specific gruesome acts than others. As the purpose in targeting journalists is to intimidate other members of the same occupation, the nature of MDTO-related violence against them is similar to violence against government administrators. Assassinations and executions are common, while torture, mass murders, and postmortem mutilations are rare. Violence against journalists is exemplified by the attack on September 16th, 2010, when a photojournalist and his intern working for the Juarez newspaper *El Diario* were gunned down in broad daylight (Vulliamy, 2010). There's evidence that the cartels are achieving their goal; Mexican and U.S. reporters refuse to track drug-related deaths in Tamaulipas for fear of assassination (Schatz, 2011).

The nature of violence against businessmen appears to be similar to intra-cartel code enforcement violence. Loss of life is not the desired immediate goal of either, as it would cripple the organizations ability to make money; however, it is sometimes utilized in order to further more immediate financial goals. Martinez Reyes, the son of a wealthy wine distributor, was kidnapped from a seafood restaurant in Aguascalientes in May of 2008. He was held for 35 days and tortured before a ransom was paid by his father (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). The case of Gerardo Ibarra also helps characterize extortion cases against businessmen. Gerardo ran a successful trucking business between Mexico City and Laredo, Texas; his trucks were pre-screened for contraband in order to reduce border crossing time. In early 2008 one of his truck drivers was attacked by cartel members, who loaded drugs onto the vehicle and demanded he continue across the border into the United States. Gerardo told the driver to abandon the vehicle. For the next three months Gerardo received threatening messages demanding his compliance with cartel

smuggling demands. Gerardo refused, and was gunned down on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 10 feet away from a police outpost (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). In both of these cases we see that physical harm or killing were not the first, nor the preferred, action taken by the drug trafficking organizations.

The nature of DTO-related violence against random citizens is both more brutal and more gruesome than violence against either journalists or businessmen. Random citizen violence is directed at those who are at the wrong place at the wrong time; as such, it's the hardest to predict or prevent. However, certain trends are common. When random citizens are targeted as a result of false information, the murders generally lack a brutal or gruesome element. This was the case in February 2010 when gunmen shot up a house in Ciudad Juarez, killing 15 and wounding at least a dozen (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). Normally drug trafficking organizations murder random citizens in order to generate notoriety. Murders for this reason can have many different gruesome characteristics similar to inter-cartel violence. In order to gain notoriety, messages are often left at the scene in order to take or blame responsibility of the act (Moore, 2012). Such was the case at a mass grave was found near the town of San Fernando, Tamaulipas, filled with persons unaffiliated with drug trafficking. One distraught relative of a victim stated that "(the drug traffickers) did it because they could" (Moore, 2012). Bodies were piled on a downtown street in Veracruz. Some of the bodies were drug traffickers, but some were also random citizens who were slain in order to add bulk to the spectacle (Moore, 2012). The oil pipeline city of Cadereyta also experienced a body dump, with the added horror of postmortem mutilation; most of the bodies were lacking hands, feet, and

heads (Moore, 2012). These incidents all illustrate the gruesome and brutal acts that may be taken against random citizens.

## **Conclusions**

When Mexican transnational criminal organization violence is placed into victim-based categories, one can observe some general patterns about the application of said violence.

### ***Concerning the relationship between the purpose of the violence and its type***

When a financial gain can be realized more immediately with the target alive, as is the case when DTO's target deviant members, legitimate businessmen, the occasional government official or random citizen, the violence is more likely to be harmful, but not life threatening: physical assault, torture, kidnapping or extortion. In contrast, if the cartels operations are more likely to generate a profit without a person or group of people, as is the case with rival cartels or incorruptible or effective government agents, the violence is more likely to end in death.

### ***Concerning the relationship between the purpose of the violence and its nature***

When attempting to intimidate large groups of a certain occupation, such as rival organizations, the public and to a certain extent security forces, drug traffickers opt for more gruesome measures: massacres, body dumps, postmortem mutilations, killings with

acid and mass murders with hand weapons. However, if their targets are apart of a numerically smaller occupation, i.e. journalists, successful criminal justice administrators or deviant cartel members, less gruesome methods are used: physical assaults, murders, executions or assassinations.



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